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SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: ANNAPOLIS (1)

¶1. SUMMARY: A Lebanese columnist in "Al-Khaleej" writes that wars have historically been waged under the umbrella of peace slogans and that Annapolis' real objective is to pave the way for wars in Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Gaza. A Jordanian columnist in "Al-Khaleej" opines that Arab participation in Annapolis is risky as the outcome is most likely futile. A Palestinian columnist in "Al-Bayan" wonders why Arab ministers rushed to participate in Annapolis, rather than wait for the U.S. to respond to Syria's call to put the Golan Heights on the agenda. The editorial in "Al-Bayan" believes that Israel expects Annapolis to be an opportunity to normalize relations with the Arab world. A columnist in "Al-Khaleej" wonders what the follow-up to Annapolis will be (and whether the conference has worth without same), and suggests that the conference may be only a forum for the West to press Arabs for concessions at a sensitive moment. The editorial in "Al-Khaleej" describes the Annapolis conference as a political carnival where all participants know that the President will not keep his promises, because he cannot pressure Israel and neither he nor Israel seriously wants results or peace. End Summary.

¶2. Under the headline "Jordanian fears", a Lebanese columnist, Saad Mehio, wrote 11/26 in his op-ed in "Al-Khaleej" (circulation 90,000):

"The Jordanian King fears the ignition of a new Palestinian civil war that could lead to an intensive migration of Palestinians to Jordan, and thus revive the idea of an alternative Palestinian state. Are these Jordanian fears legitimate? Definitely yes. Annapolis will certainly fail to achieve Palestinian-Israeli peace, but who said this was the real objective anyway? Khaled Mashaal was right when he recently said that the real purpose of Annapolis is to prepare for wars of domination in Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Gaza. After all, most wars in history have been waged under the umbrella of peace slogans!"

¶3. Under the headline "Annapolis opportunities and caveats?" a Jordanian columnist, Mahmood Al-Remawi, wrote 11/26 op-ed in "Al-Khaleej" (circulation 90,000):

"Nobody will be surprised if Annapolis produces a futile outcome; in fact, it will be surprising if it produces a significant one. If the outcome is useless, the participating Palestinian and Arab

parties should blame themselves; they had the choice from the start not to respond to a vague occasion..."

"Nevertheless, Arab participation happened and can be described only as risky. It was not associated with successful performance... [i.e. conditions that would establish two options:] on the one hand, failure, the blame for which would belong to Israel and America; on the other hand, the possibility of having the conference produce a meaningful outcome and guarantee continuing the political process within a short timeframe, through clear mechanisms that would be abided by.

¶4. Under the headline "Arabs and Annapolis?" a Palestinian columnist, Ahmed Omarabi, wrote 11/26 in his op-ed in Dubai-based Arabic daily "Al-Bayan" (circulation 85,000):

"The Arab ministers sent a request from Syria to Washington to include the Golan Heights issue on the Annapolis agenda. The Syrian Foreign Minister said that if Washington's response was positive, Syria would participate in the conference. But the question that needs to be raised is: Wouldn't it have been wiser for the Arab ministers to wait for the American response before deciding to participate in the conference?"

¶5. Under the headline "Far from a message of reassurance and a follow-up committee", the 11/26 editorial in Dubai-based Arabic daily "Al-Bayan" (circulation 85,000) read:

"The number of conferences has become countless yet their outcomes on the ground grow worse and worse: the settlement expansion; the wall extension; the intensification of the blockade. We are witnessing more incursions, more assassinations and more of these

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suffocating policies of "barriers". This is why Arab and Palestinian doubts are in place. Israel wants Annapolis only as an opportunity to normalize [relations with Arabs]. Israeli media and officials spoke openly about that; [in fact] what solidified [Arab] doubts was that Israel was too manipulative and strong-headed at the outset of Annapolis."

¶6. Under the headline "What comes after Annapolis?" a columnist, Jaafar Mohammed Ahmed, wrote 11/27 in his op-ed in "Al-Khaleej":

"Peace is an Arab option. Arab solidarity in going to Annapolis requires a more important unanimity: unifying visions and positions for achieving peace and security in the region, and rejecting any further concessions regardless of pressure applied by Western powers seeking to gain more concessions at this very sensitive and critical stage. Annapolis comes at a time where Bush is looking desperately abroad for any victory to cover his failures in Afghanistan and Iraq, to incur gains to the Republican Party, and to accomplish his goals before the end of his term. At last, the fuss about convening this conference has ended today as it marks its start; regardless of how futile the outcome will be, the important question that jumps to mind is this: What comes after Annapolis?"

¶7. Under the headline "Annapolis carnival?" the editorial in Sharjah-based Arabic daily "Al-Khaleej" 11/27 read:

"The greatest obstacle to the establishment of a Palestinian state is that Israel refuses to return to the borders of 1967, still clings to its settlements in the West Bank, works to Judaize the city of Jerusalem, continues building the wall that divides Palestinian territories, and does not recognize the right of return of the Palestinian refugees nor the UN sponsored resolutions. Bush knows all these factors will not allow him to fulfill his promise, as he is no longer now in a position to compel Israel to submit to what he wants. Annapolis looks more like a political carnival where the Palestinian cause and its participants are presented in caricature; [they are convinced] that the American President will not seriously abide by his obligations because he cannot and because

he does not want them converted into reality. Israel, at the same time, does not seriously want to achieve peace because it believes that balance of power is the only way to impose [its will on others]. What we are afraid of, is that the United States along with Israel will try to exploit the [weak] Arab situation and squander [ignore/brush aside] the Palestinians."

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